

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

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A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the
old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

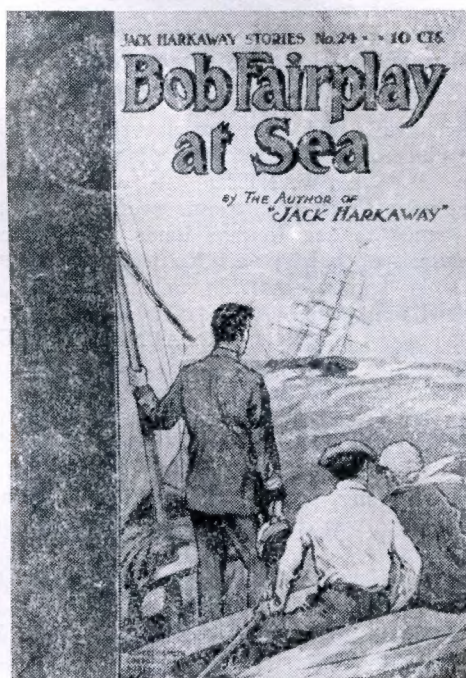
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A DIME NOVELIST'S MONTHLY READING

By Edward T. LeBlanc



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 236

JACK HARKAWAY STORIES

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A DIME NOVELIST'S MONTHLY READING

By Edward T. LeBlanc

Your editor does a lot of dime novel reading during the course of a month. Many dime novels are difficult to read having been written for young persons and in a different era. However, most of them can be enjoyed if the reader will suspend criticism. The following are excerpts from a varied group of dime novels and the reader of this article can judge for himself whether or not he or she wishes to spend time in reading them. Personally, I have always enjoyed reading material where no effort is needed to understand the text.

First on my list is:

THE YANKEE BOY WHALER; OR, LIFE IN THE NORTHERN SEAS,
by ALBERT J. BOOTH (a stock name used by publisher Frank Tousey).
No. 678 of Wide Awake Library dated July 29, 1885.

COMMENT: The writer of this story apparently used an expose of the whaling industry as the basis of his story for he deals quite harshly with the whaling barons, in all probability well deserved.

"One day the dead walls and fences of a certain quiet country town in Massachusetts were placarded with the following notice:

WANTED

Fifty able-bodied young men (Americans preferred) to go on a whaling voyage. Excellent chance to see foreign lands. Rapid promotion. Money easily made. The chance of a lifetime. No previous experience necessary. Outfits furnished. Only warm climates visited. Doctors on board every vessel. First-class food and plenty of it. Now is the time. Apply at once to
GRABNER & GREED

New Bedford, Mass.

This notice was seen by Tom Sands, a young Yankee of eighteen years, residing in the town, and he was at once taken in by it, as many a poor fellow has been by the specious declarations of that class of men known as landsharks.

Tom was tired of farming, the old place was run down, his father was in need of money, and here was a chance to make it and put the farm once more on a paying basis.

He resolved to go to New Bedford at once, engage as a green hand on one of Grabner & Greed's vessels, and return in a couple of years or so with a fortune when he could retire and settle down for such was the glowing picture he drew in his innocence.

That night he announced his intention of going to sea, and his parents made no objection, as they considered that he might possibly do something,

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and, at any rate, there would be one less mouth to feed, and as for doing without his work, why there were Dan and Josh and George still left, all of them strong boys who could easily supply his place.

Tom not only went up to New Bedford himself, but he took with him the son of a neighbor, Jim Dagget, who was in a similar situation to Tom's father, and was not all sorry to let him go.

Arrived at New Bedford, the two boys had some little difficulty in finding Grabner & Greed's establishment, but at last a grizzled old sea-dog on the wharf directed them to the place, and they set out for it in high spirits.

Mr. Grabner was in, but very busy when they entered the store, and Tom had a chance to look at him before interviewing him.

He was short, thick-set, round-shouldered to such an extent that he was almost hunchback, and had a shrewd, crafty face, little twinkling eyes, surrounded by thick tufts of hair, a sharp nose, thin lips, retreating chin, and great bulging forehead, which gave a decidedly top-heavy look to his face.

A stiff white felt hat was stuck on the back of his head, his trousers were baggy and turned up at the bottom, his coat was too small for him, and had given away under the arms in consequence, but over his ample waistcoat hung half a yard of gilded watchchain and a bunch of seals as big as your fist.

"Anything I can do for you?" he said, in sharp, quick tones, to Tom, when he had finished with his customer.

"We want to go whaling," said Tom, briefly.

"Ever been to sea before?" in the same incisive tones.

"No."

"Don't want you. Can get plenty of men that know all about it, without taking green hands."

"But you say in your notice that no experience—."

"Can't help that. Don't want you," and the man of business turned to speak to a weather-beaten old chap that had just entered, and looked as though he might have been around the Horn forty times.

Tom was discouraged, but Jim said cheerfully:

"Never mind, Tom: I saw lots of agents' places on the way here, and there are plenty of ships fitting out in the harbor. We ought to be able to find something."

"Hold up there, you fellows!" cried Grabner, suddenly, upon hearing Jim's words. "Take a seat, read the papers, amuse yourselves. There's some captains that prefers green hands, and some of them are likely to be in here shortly. Sit down."

This last was said in so peremptory a tone that there seemed to be nothing to do but obey, and the boys did so accordingly.

The fact of the matter was that Grabner had seen with those sharp eyes of his that the boys were fully in earnest in looking for a vessel, and that they would not rest until they found one, and as he had no notion of letting his rivals in business get hold of them, he determined to secure them himself.

Taking the sea-faring man into the rear of the shop, the agent and outfitter conversed with him for some time, and at last called the two boys to come up, and forthwith introduced his companion.

"This is Captain Hathaway, boys, of the schooner Diver, now getting ready to sail. He wants lively young fellows that ain't afraid to work, and who won't fight nor get drunk."

"Ever been to sea?" asked Captain Hathaway, chewing away on a big cigar he held in his mouth.

"No, sir; but I am used to hard work," answered Tom, and he held out his hand for the skipper to examine.

"Well, I'm somewhat in a hurry, and I guess I'll take 'em," growled the captain, "though I do hate to waste time in learnin' green hands, I'll give 'em the hundred and fiftieth, but no more. I'd lose on 'em if I did."

Grabner explained that they were to receive as their pay one hundred and fiftieth of the profits of the voyage; for instance, if she brought or sent home fifteen hundred barrels of oil during the trip, they would each receive the price of ten barrels, besides their board during the time they were out.

"If oil is worth a hundred a barrel, you'll have a thousand dollars coming to you when you get back," said Grabner, in conclusion. "Ain't that an inducement? Why you might take that much in a year, or even less, for Captain Bill is a lucky fellow, and always comes home loaded."

If Grabner had said, "loaded with rum," he would have been speaking only the honest truth, for the old man was a notorious tippler, and never allowed an opportunity to pass without filling himself up to the muzzle.

"Now, if you'll just sign the articles, I'll get your outfits," continued the agent, "and you can aboard tonight."

The boys signed an agreement to go upon a whaling voyage on the schooner Diver, length of trip not specified, at such a percentage and rate as green hands, after which Grabner picked out the things that they would be likely to need aboard the vessel.

These included a sea-chest, a suit of oiled clothing, a sou'wester, a reef-er, two light suits, two suits of light underclothing and one of heavy, a dozen pairs of woolen socks, a pair of heavy trousers, a pair of duck ones, a mattress and double blanket, a quart pot, a tin plate, a knife, fork and spoon, a jack knife, a sheath knife, half dozen bars of salt water soap, two pounds of tobacco and a box of clay pipes, this last being given to each.

"You can leave the tobacco out; I don't smoke nor chew," said Tom.

"Better take it," said Grabner; "you can sell it to them that does," and the tobacco was included in the bill at one dollar a pound.

"Just sign these orders," said a brisk young clerk, giving the boys two printed slips. "I'll fill in the amount when I have more time."

"What are they for?" asked Tom.

"Orders on the owners of the vessel for your bills. They pay us, and you pay them when you come back. Just sign 'em, and I'll fill 'em out afterward."

"But I thought outfits were furnished. It says so in the notices."

"Well, you must be jolly green. So they are furnished, but you don't suppose you get 'em for nothing, do you? Come, come, I'm in a hurry; sign the order and let me get out."

"Well, I may be jolly green," said Tom, flushing, "but I'm not so verdant as to sign an order before I know what it's for. Figure up your total and show me the items, and then I'll sign it, but not before."

The clerk went off whistling, and Grabner was taken with a sudden fit of coughing, while Tom and Jim began packing their belongings into their chests.

It had been a neat trick of Grabner's to get a man flurried, secure his signature to the order on the agents, hurry him off, and afterward clap fifty or seventy-five per cent, on the bill and get his money.

When the man returned his bill had been paid the money taken out of his earnings, and although he might know it to be exorbitant, there was no redress.

When Grabner saw that Tom was not to be taken in that way, he immediately put up the price on everything that the boy had, so as to get even in some way, knowing that as they had signed the ship's articles they would be obliged to go or be arrested for desertion, and knowing also that no other outfitters would furnish them unless they shipped them as well.

Tom thought the bill was considerable, but Grabner assured him that he would make five or six times that amount, leaving him a handsome profit on the voyage.

"You may be made a harpooner or second mate before you get back," he said, gleefully, "and then you'll have all the more. Just think of that."

The boys saw their things put on board the vessel, then lying at anchor in the bay, and started out for a walk around town, while Grabner went tearing like mad up Union street and down again, half a dozen times in an hour, as though the whole business of the port of New Bedford rested upon his round shoulders.

"H'm! Looks 's if he owned the hull town and part of the state besides," muttered the old salt that had directed the boys to the agents "Some men have a terrible idee of their importance, and that old shark is one of 'em, Josh Ring is another and Richards is another, but they're all sharks, evert one of 'em, and they'd just as lief skin the last dollar out of a poor sailor man as they'd eat a meal's victuals, and a great deal liefer too, you bet."

CHAPTER TWO

After seeing as much of the town as they cared to at one time, Tom and Jim returned to the wharf, got a man to row them out to the vessel, and went below.

The forecastle was below decks, just forward of the try-works now covered over, and was dark, small and smelled of oil, tobacco, rum and a dozen other things combined, being by no means inviting to the two boys who had been used to much better quarters.

There was no one aboard but a watchman and one or two seamen, the latter being asleep in their bunks below, getting over the effects of a protracted spree the cook being in the same condition in his bunk in the after cabin.

They had expected to get something to eat, but there was nothing for them, no fire in the galley, the pantry locked up and no one to unlock it, so that they must either go ashore or remain hungry.

"Why, ain't we going to sail in the morning?" asked Tom.

"Believe so," returned the watchman. "Can't tell yet. Don't know as the old man has got all his hands yet."

"The old man? What old man—the gent?"

"No, no—the captain. He's allus the old man. Don't you know that?"

"Why don't they call him the captain, then, if he is the captain? He might be a young man, anyhow."

"Don't make no dif, he'd be the old man just the same. Maybe you kin tell me why the call old Slush-bucket the doctor?"

"Perhaps it's because old Slush-bucket is the doctor," said Jim. "I don't see any other reason. But what a funny name! Does the doctor have very much to do aboard the vessel?"

"Well, he seems to think so when they ain't doing anything on account of fair weather and he has to cook all their grub for them just the same."

"Does the doctor cook?" asked Tom. "That's a queer notion."

"Does he cook? Why, of course he does, and nothing else. How could he be the doctor if he didn't."

"Then the cook is the doctor, as the captain is the old man—is that it?"

"Why, to be sure. Guess you must be awful green if you don't know that much."

"Well, as there don't seem to be any chance of getting anything to eat, I think we'd better go on shore and get our supper," said Tom, rising from his seat on the hatch.

"No, you don't" said the watchman, quickly. "Once you're here, you've got to stay, and them's orders. How do I know that you won't go off and get roaring, and perhaps not turn up till after the vessel sails? If you didn't want to stay you shouldn't 'ave come aboard."

"Well, but we're 'most starved, and, besides, we don't want to get roaring, whatever that is; we only want to have something to eat, and then come back."

"Can't help what you want. You can't go ashore, unless the old man says so. Besides, where's your boat? You can't lower one of these, and they's no others."

"Somebody else may come aboard, and we'll go back in the boat they come in."

"Not if I know it," muttered the watchman. "You're here, and you've got to stay."

"Well, if we can't eat, we can sleep," muttered Tom, and going below, he tumbled into the first bunk he come to, and was soon sound asleep, Jim remaining on deck talking to the watchman.

At about nine o'clock some of the crew came aboard, sat on deck for an hour or so and then went below, and at midnight others appeared, most of them being foremast hands.

"So we got out in the morning, do we old Tarbucket?" asked one of the late comers, evidently, by his manners. "Where's old Gin-and-Sugar?"

"Ain't come aboard yet, sir."

"When he does he'll come boiling, I suppose? Who's the young 'un?"

"One of the new hands, sir."

"Ever been whaling before?" asked the officer, turning to Jim and receiving a negative answer.

"No? Nor to sea, neither? Well you'll learn something before you get back if we don't get stuck in the ice and never get back."

"Stuck in the ice?" repeated Jim. "How are we going to do that in warm latitudes?"

"Who told you we were going into warm latitudes? Well, we may for a time, to be sure, but it's more likely that we'll go north at once so as to be on hand when the season opens. Did that oil skin tell you that?"

"Mr. Grabner said so, or at least his notice did."

"H'm the old song again. Did you ever hear it?"

"'Twas advertised in Boston, New York and Buffalo,

Five hundred bold Americans a-whaling for to go,

So, blow you winds of morning

Blow you winds, high'o,

Clear away your running gear

And blow, boys blow!"

"Did you never hear that?" continued the man, after singing the lines in a rich voice. "I'll give you some more of it:

"Oh, when you come to town, my boys, he'll show you all about

And a year you'll be a secondmate before you're six month out

So, blow you winds of morning,

Blow ye winds, high-o,
Clear away your running gear
And blow, boys blow!"

"Yes, and that's not all, as you'll see if you stay long enough, for the song says:

"Oh, when yo're in New Bedford they treat you very well,
But when you're out to sea, my boys, you'll get it worse than —"

"Well, you can image the rest. There's about five hundred verses to that song, as near as I can make out, and every one with a chorus to it, and they're all as true as preaching."

"Yes, and a good deal truer than some of the preaching you get in this town. Every one these sharks belongs to the New Bedford Society for the Moral Enlightenment of Seamen, or some such title, all in big letters, and they go to big churches and sit on cushions and snivel, and then go to the store next day and slap ten dollars upon some poor fellow's bill, after he's been packed away in a hurry and signed something he didn't look at; and that's the kind they are.

"Well, young fellow, I suppose you're regularly shipped and can't get out of it honorably, so let me give you two or three bits of advice for you to think on when you turn in.

"First, never give the old man any back talk, for he's boss and can make the place a floating infernal regions for you if he likes, and he very often does like.

"Second, don't growl nor abuse the old pirate behind his back if you're not in a position to do it to his teeth, for there's always a lot of sea lawyers about that'll be ready to carry tales at all times and make it warm for you, don't you forget it.

"Third, learn as fast as you can; always jump to obey an order, whether you know how to do it or not, and that's how you learn; don't grumble at your grub, for it might be worse; don't shirk your work; don't go to sleep on your watch on deck, and don't get drunk every time you go ashore. That's all for to-night. So good luck to you, and a pleasant voyage."

"Who is that?" asked Jim, when the man had disappeared in the cabin.

"Second mate. Nice fellow when he's a mind to be. It's just as he says, though, and you'll find it out before long."

Jim was now sleeping himself, and he turned in and slept till morning, when he found that the captain had come aboard, and that they were getting under weigh.

All hands were called to raise the anchor and get up sail, and Tom and Jim turned out with the rest, although they were very much confused and scarcely knew what to do, finally doing what they saw the others do.

It was now about nine o'clock, and it was some little time before the vessel got clear of the ships in the bay, rounded the many points, dodged the shoals, hailed the light-ships, and got well out into deep water, and all this time there was nothing to eat, and Tom was nearly famished.

Finally, when things were going all right, the captain and mate came on deck, the men all stood along the weather rail and the watches were told off, each officer choosing a man in turn after all the names were called, to see that none were missing.

Tom was in the starboard watch, that headed by the captain, and Jim in the larboard, or mate's watch, so that they would not be on deck together except in the dog watches from four to eight in the afternoon.

Dinner was served at noon, and Tom ate heartily, it being nearly twenty-

four hours since either he or Jim had had anything.

In the afternoon the sea was rougher than in the morning, and at night Tom found out that, being in the captain's watch, he would have to be on deck eight hours, while Jim would have only four, sleeping the rest.

It was his luck, too, that it should come to blow, and the vessel tossed about in a terrible manner, poor Tom, already weak from long fasting, being made deathly sick and thinking that he was going to die every minute.

He managed to sleep a little during the middle watch, but some funny joker pulled the boards out of the bottom of the bunk, and let him on the floor, and after that there was no rest for him.

He went on deck at four o'clock, and was roundly abused by the captain for shirking, and not having received the advice that Jim had, forgot himself and answered back, for which he was promptly kicked down and sworn at roundly.

After that he did what he could, keeping out of the captain's sight as much as possible, and trying his best to get over the dreadful feeling of nausea which racked him from head to foot.

He turned in after breakfast, sick and worn out, and with nobody to look after him, Jim being obliged to remain on deck.

The motion of the vessel was still very violent—he could do nothing but roll about in his bunk—whatever food he ate was rejected as soon as swallowed, and when he came on deck after dinner he was as yellow as saffron and could hardly stand.

Then the humane skipper was at him again, and set him scrubbing the paint work, knocking the rush of the cable and other dirty jobs until he grew so faint and dizzy that it was patent to all that he was totally unfit for work.

"I'll teach him to soldier and give me back talk," growled Captain Bill, as he was called. "I'll show you who's boss here, blow me if I don't.

"That young fellow isn't sojering," said the second mate. "He's sick, and any fool can see it."

"Shut up, Ike Pool, and mind yer business. I ain't no fool, and I can't see it. Folks that kin work and won't work must be made to, and that's all," and the tyrant ordered Tom into the rigging to scrape and slush the mainmast, and to be quick about it, too.

Poor Tom had hardly reached the rail, however, before he fell in a dead faint and had to be carried below and put in his bunk.

Jim took care of him the rest of the afternoon, and Pool berated the captain roundly for his cruelty, in the cabin, however, and not on deck, where everybody could hear him.

"If it wasn't for leaving that boy in your hands," he said, "I'd take a boat and go ashore this minute, far away as it is. That kind of treatment may do for Portuguese and Sandwich Islanders, but it won't do for white men. Everybody knows you can't get a decent crew on that account. If you prayed less and had more decency about you, it'd be plainer sailing."

Tom was well enough the next day, but he was sick enough of whaling, although as yet the voyage had scarcely begun, and there was plenty more trouble in store for him.

He resolved to do his best, however, and show the brute of a captain that he could work as well as anybody, and with this resolution he turned to with a will.

The Diver sailed north and Tom and Jim had a few adventures with some malicious crew members, including the ship's carpenter who took a dislike to

them because of their independence. However both Tom and Jim came out ahead. Off Greenland whales were sighted and the purpose of the voyage was partly fulfilled. The captain, greedy for more whales kept going north against the advice of the first and second mates. Consequently the ship became fast in the ice and had to spend the winter in idleness.

There are adventures with polar bears when a group of crewmen go ashore to explore the area. One of the polar bears is killed providing a change of menu for a while and the skin is made into a number of warm jackets. During one shore expedition the carpenter's hatred of Tom causes him to push him into an ice abyss. Tom is given up for dead, however, he makes his way out and discovers an Esquimault village and is cared for. After a few weeks he is able to make his way back to the Diver where he is greeted with much warmth and relief. In the spring the vessel is freed from the ice and continues its search for whales. In this they are successful, both Tom and Jim have now become very adept as seamen. Tom becoming a harpooner. In the fall their barrels are full and they return to New Bedford.

Tom was paid off, and received considerably more than Grabner had told him he would, and then the man actually had the assurance to ask Tom to buy his shore-clothes of him, as though he had not made enough out of the boy already.

Tom has now retired from active life, there being less money in the whaling business than formerly; but as for Captan Bill, Tom does not know where he is, and does not care, having no further taste for adventures in northern seas.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DUCATA; OR, RAINY DAYS IN THE DIGGINGS, by EDWARD L. WHEELER. No. 347 Beadle's Half Dime Library, March 18, 1884.

COMMENT: The description of Devil's Diggings gives a good contemporary account of a western mining camp that now dot the western mountains as ghost towns. Roaring Ruth was some kind of woman and quite advanced physically and sexually for the 1880's or so we are led to believe by present views on the Victorian era.

"Devil's Diggings wasn't much of a camp, the first beholder would be apt to say, for in truth, there was but two buildings in the 'city.'

The diggings in themselves were located in the gulch bottom, and were without exception placer claims operated upon by three-score of miners, who barely eked out enough dust to keep them in "fodder," whiskey, and now and then a dollar, to venture at the card-table. -

Devil's Diggings had been started by an old cranky-tempered and miserly chap, named Jonas Argyle.

He had, with his nephew, Nick Norvel, discovered gold in the bottom, and had immediately legally possessed himself of all the neighboring territory that careful prospecting proclaimed would yield any value in the way of minerals.

His next move was to erect the only two structures that composed the camp. One was a small shanty, designed for, and stocked up as a supply store. The other building was a huge affair, some two hundred by two hundred and fifty feet, built of logs and slabs, and divided into one large and many small apartments.

This building had a truly imposing appearance, and was designed for the accommodation of whosoever stopped off in Devil's Diggings—that is, if they had the wealth to "come down" for their accommodations, if they did not,

they were politely invited to move on to the next town.

When he had everything in readiness, old Argyle had "boomed" his town, and by a moderate expenditure of money, secured a stage route through it, running from a couple of more important camps.

Of course there was a moderate rush to the new diggings, and a number of claims were sold—more than enough to secure the success of the old miner's scheme.

In leasing the claims, each miner was bound by papers not to erect any sort of habitation thereon, and it was a part of the agreement that said miners, or their employees, should board and lodge at the Hotel Argyle, paying its regular rates, and should purchase all their various necessities and et ceteras at the Argyle supply store.

Old Argyle, in leasing the claims, made a reserve of ten per cent of all minerals taken from them; and thus, in all respects, he had an emphatic monopoly that was bound to line his purse more or less liberally, according as this town was successful.

Some twenty claims had been taken up, and were worked by about two-score of miners, who composed the major part of the population.

Very likely more claims would have been located, but it was not every miner the stage dropped off at Devil's Diggings who cared to invest, and agree to Argyle's exacting stipulations; hence the camp had remained since its start a two-shanty "city" and likely, no similar "city" existed in all the Far West.

Its population all had to endure with such accommodations as the Argyle afforded; miners, though, in some instances, boarding themselves in their rooms in preference to paying the cost of eating at the regular hotel table.

The main room, or largest one, which was located on the ground floor, was given up to several uses. It was the hotel office, bar-room, gambling parlor, court-room (where local justice was dispensed by Judge Tamarack Splinter), dining-room, and general place of resort for the entire population.

"Judge" Tamarack Splinter was a lawyer, and consequently was considered, and considered himself, an important fixture of the diggings.

Old Argyle and young Norvel, although they owned and managed the monopoly through which the camp existed, were not looked up to with much respect, and were really considered of less actual importance than the judge.

Of course, the camp had its inevitable ruffian—its "bloody terror." In this instance, the mad individual was a gent of leisure—a man about town, who lived not be the sweat of his brow, but practically by the dexterity of his fingers, and the abnormal size of his impudence.

Professionally, Jake McBride was a gambler. He was a brawny, muscular "tough" of the most pronounced Western order, with a fierce, ugly visage, dark and swarthy, that in itself was a phototype of his brutal nature. His jetty hair, mustache and goatee, too, gave tone to his evil aspect, and he ever dressed with a slovenly disregard to neatness, drank like a fish, and wore a brace of six-shooters in either bootleg, in addition to his belt weapons.

He was feared by all, having already killed three men since anchoring down at the diggings, and to dispute his veracity, or argue about a point in a game of cards was considered as fatal as would be a convicted murderer's chances in the State of New Jersey.

One evening, the citizens of Devil's Diggings were congregated in the Argyle, and dissatisfaction was manifested among them.

The fall rains were coming on, and that was probably the main cause of

trouble, for this wet spell, in any mining locality, is a thing that miners universally dread; but in Devil's Diggings there was somewhat more anxiety.

The camp was less than six months old, and as a habitable place, had not yet passed through the periodical rainy season, peculiar to that particular region. The formation of the surrounding country was such as to give rise to grave fears that the drainage of the mountains would resolve into a heavy freshet, that must sweep through the gulch, of course with disastrous result, washing away much of the valuable pay-dirt, and wrecking the sluiceways and other mining apparatus that had already been planted.

Then, too, if no real freshet should occur; the rainy spell promised to be an unusually severe and protracted one, as the summer had been torrid and very arid; and therefore, but little work could be done, ere winter set in; so that the prospects ahead were rather gloomy.

As usual in a mining town, where the public pulse is ever fluctuating, the initial sign of general discouragement can best be discerned by the manner in which the miners take to heavier drinking than usual; and the miners of Devil's Diggings were no exception to the rule.

"Red-nose," "old bezam," "carbolic acid," "oil of vitriol," "straight bug," and so forth—such and others, were the titles used by the miners, clustering at the Argyle bar in search of better cheer, and as each beverage came from one bottle characteristically labeled "pizen," it is safe to presume that each man got what he wanted.

Jake McBride sat at a table, as usual, in a bad humor, noting the discouraged feeling that was only too plainly expressed upon the faces of the miners. He knew that when the miners felt the loss of a dollar, except it were for whisky, they were chary about visiting or risking any cash at the gaming table; consequently, his own vocation promised to be profitless.

When miners were "flush," he was not disposed to be sociable; but he saw, now, that he must needs do something to keep on good terms with them or they might forget the man who delighted to rake in their hard earnings.

After they had imbibed several rounds, he arose and swaggered to the bar.

"Wall, boyees," he said, "it looks like ye war in fer a leetle enjoyment, an' I s'poseye havn't no 'jections ter my j'inin' in the quadrille. So let's all be merry. Nominate yer 'was,' one an' all. Mine's 'rough on rats!'"

Now the gambler was about the last man in the camp addicted to such spasms of liberality, and the crowd stared.

"Spit 'er out, I say!" McBride ordered. "Tain't often ye hev the honor at grinnin' at yours truly. Produce the cistern, Satan, an' remember, it's the best, at the expense of Jake McBride."

Satan was the nickname for the dispenser of liquor at the Argyle bar, and he was a barkeeper who could set out the glasses and liquor with wonderful rapidity and equal urbanity.

The glasses were filled, and the health of McBride was drank with great gusto.

The emptied glasses had just been set down upon the bar when the door opened and a stranger walked into the room.

He was cloaked in a heavy water-proof which reached to the tops of his knee boots, and wore a slouched sombrero.

His figure was of usual proportions, and his face darkly handsome, with its black eyes and curling mustache, and hair of the same hue.

He carried a jeweled riding whip in his hand—both hands were gloved with brown kid—and had the bearing of a frontiersman, whether sportive or

otherwise, might he be.

He took a swift glance about the apartment, and at its habitues; then spoke, in a clear voice:

"Evening, gents! Does the man who leases claims hang out here?" he asked.

"He do, you bet!" McBride declared, getting a second ahead of Judge Tamarack Splinter, as spokesman—and that was a wonder, too, as the judge counted himself a talker, from Talkerville. "Old Argyle aire the man, and aire he, over thar, in the office, wi' the green goggles an' the turn up nose, w'at looks as if he war tryin' to smell the brimstone o' futurity. But, I say, pardner, aire ye goin' to buy a claim?"

"Not one, but half-a-dozen, if I can get 'em at my terms," the dashing stranger answered.

"Bully for you, sir! I always thought some enterprising chap like you, would come along an' give the town a start. Come up—we've jest been smilin'—an' have a drink."

"Thanks. I've caught enough moisture, outside, for immediate requirements," and smiling, the stranger walked away, toward the office wherein old Argyle, and his nephew, took turns in presiding.

Jake McBride glared after the stranger, his face flaming with anger.

"He refused ter drink wi' me, didn't he?" he demanded, turning to the gang, for whom he had just "set 'em up."

"Of course he did, an' yer entitled ter an apology," a miner decided.

"Not accordin' ter law!" declared the judge. "Blackstone sez that refusin' ter drink ain't offense comin' under the statutes or any legal jurisdiction!"

"You keep yer lip out, or I'll make a Bilson out of you!" McBride roared so savagely that the legal light of Devil's Diggings turned pale.

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! Ex-keuse me!" the judge faltered, for he really had a horror of bed men, and most emphatically of the terror of the diggings. "I really meant no offense, sir. Of course the man is required to apologize to you—of course he is!"

If the stranger thought so, his action did not go to show it. He walked up to the counter behind which was Jonas Argyle's office, and nodded to the stub-nosed, withered speculator.

"You are old Argyle, I presume!" he said composedly.

"I am Mr. Jonas Argyle!" was the stiff reply. Old Argyle died a quarter of a century ago!"

"Ah, excuse me! I took you for him. You look old enough to have been Cains's brother, Abel. I believe you dabble a little in mining claims—that is to say, you have some to sell?"

"No, sir; I have some to lease for two years, but none to sell."

"Ah! Let me have the location of these claims and the particulars."

"I have a chart here. The lease, per claim is two thousand a year, in advance. So, if you think the terms would be too high, I will not go to the trouble of showing you the chart."

"You lazy old boor. Trot out your chart. Of course I intend to invest!"

With an effort, old Argyle, produced the chart, and gave the required explanations. The most of the claims were on the north of the hotel. There were half a dozen below, but these were comparatively worthless, he said, and he could not say for sure that there was any pay-dirt upon them.

"How much will you take for them?" the stranger asked, carelessly.

"Oh! a thousand apiece!"

"Say five thousand for the six, and I'll take 'em!"

"It's a bargain! Give me the cash. I'll give you a receipt, and the lease will be ready for you to-morrow."

Nodding, the stranger took a large roll of bills from his pocket, and counted out the exact amount; receiving, in return, a receipt in full for the same.

The name given by the stranger was Kid Karl; he then walked back toward the bar.

The crowd had drawn to one side, and were conversing in undertones over the prospects of a "jamboree"—for Jake McBride still stood leaning against the bar, the ugly expression upon his ugly face, clearly proving that it was not his intention to let the fancied insult pass by unnoticed.

Without paying the least attention to him, Kid Karl sauntered up to the bar, and laying down a quarter—the price of a single drink—said pleasantly:

"A little good whisky, please."

His face depicting considerable surprise, Satan set for the bottle and a single glass. The stranger poured a moderate drink, and raised it towards his lips.

Insantly there was a pistol report, and the glass yas shattered by a bullet. The same bullet, also took off the tip of Kid Karl's right forefinger.

He looked around, not deigning to notice the injured member, and saw McBride with the smoking revolver still in his grasp, and a malicious grin upon his face.

"It was me!" the gambler declared, with a leer. "Got anything ter say erbout it?"

"Most assuredly, I have!" Kid Karl responded, promptly. "I want to know what you mean by your action just now?"

"Mean!" echoed McBride—"mean? Why, stranger, ye orter feel grateful I let ye off alive!"

"Had I? And what for?"

It was innocently asked.

McBride laughed outright, while the crowd smiled, broadly.

"What for?" the gambler ejaculated. "Why, stranger, ye waltzed inter this shebang, didn't ye?"

"No, sire. I walked in!"

"Oh! ye needn't chirp up so smart-like. Ye waltzed in. Ye found us galoots jest arter havin' a drink, didn't ye!"

"The appearances went to indicate some such fact."

"I invited ye up ter smile, an' ye sed 'nay'?"

"Very well. Go on!"

"Waal, accordin' ter the rules of ettercut, that war a p'zen insult!"

"Indeed!"

"Sartin! Ye warn't dry—oh! no! Yet wi'in fifteen minnits ye cum back an' bought yer own sap wi'out as much as winkin' at us, or axin' us hed we a b'iler. Now, as a usual thing, we plant a man 'thout ceremony for a thing like that, but I reckoned ye war sorter green, an' so I sumply reminded ye o' yer fergitfulness by distributin' yer slop so ther boyees c'u'd ketch ther scent of it. Them's that lightest penalties ever inflicted, in this hyer burg; so we'll drink wi' ye, an' call it squar'. Come up boyees! We all gulp at ther tenderfut's expense. Mine's nitro-glycerin!"

"Excuse me, gents. You treat yourselves at my expense when I ask you!" Kid Karl cried fiercely. "As for you, sir ruffian, if you want to fight, put those tools away, and come and let me break your big jaw!"

McBride uttered a howl of joy.

An instant later he leaped toward the stranger, and a wicked battle of bared knuckles began.

McBride was largely the stranger's superior in size and muscular development, and though he was himself badly punished, he finally succeeded in knocking his antagonist senseless to the floor.

"Keep your place!" a cool voice immediately cried. "I will take up the man's quarrel, and see if you can knock me out so easy!"

And through the open doorway Roaring Ruth stepped into the room.

The advent of Roaring Ruth, as may be supposed, created a wide-spread sensation, coming as she did with so warlike an announcement.

Right behind her came Dutch Dave, carrying their weapons, while the sedate-lookin-burro brought up the rear.

Roaring Ruth, to make the matter seem more strange, looked to be dead in earnest.

Jake McBride turned and glared at her a moment in incredulous wonderment, as if he was not really satisfied that he heard aright.

Then he burst into an uproarious guffaw, while rather a suggestive smile appeared upon the face of the rough-visaged audience.

"Did I heer ye say anything?" the gambler demanded, turning toward her and making an over-obsequious courtesy. "Did I heer ye whisper in dulcet tones, high key of G, that ye would like ter gine yer ruby lips to mine in osculatory greeting?"

"I told you to keep the floor, and I would take up this gentleman's quarrel," Ruth declared coolly. "I always did hate to see a great calf, like you, a-tryin' ter crowd a sickly 'un out o' the stanchion. If you want to stand up afore me, I'll agree to knock you out so quick that ye won't know yer nose from the hummex of a Sahara camel."

"Ye'll mash my smeller, hey?"

"You bet!"

"An' spread my countenance out so flat it'll look like a forty-acre farm?"

"Shouldn't a bit wonder ef I would?"

"Ye'll put mourning circles around my eyes an' send my molars down my throat ter chaw my liver up into mince-meat?"

"Come waltz me and see!" was the cool response, which amazed the bystanders beyond expression.

Compared with the gambler, Roaring Ruth was of but pygmy size, for although possessed of a well-molded figure, she was short of stature, and illy-matched to stand before such a man as the ruffian card-manipulator.

"Ye heer her!" that worthy cried, turning to the crowd. "Ye hear what ther leetle saphead sez. She allows she kin put a nose on me!"

"Thet aire against the law. I'll arrest ye both for prize fightin'!" sung out Judge Tamarack Splinter.

"Wait till I get my hooks onter ye—I'll make ye need a grave-stone, instead o' Blackstone!" warned McBride.

"My dear heifer," he added, playfully throwing a kiss at Ruth, "I shel hev to decline yer offer ter commit suicide, on ther grounds thet et would be inhuman fer me to punch apurty piece o' caliker like you. Who be ye?"

"I'm Roarin' Ruth, an' I kin back up my cognomen every day in the week. Why, ye don't opine I'm afeard of ye, do ye? You're nothin' but a half-grown pimple. Ef ye don't believe it, come an' let me put a patent blister on yer jaw! I'm the boss gal from Black-an' Tan, and you bet I'm on my muscle. Dare ye come?"

"Durst I come?" repeated McBride—"durst I? Waal, I should belch up a bulldorg!—an' rememerm dear little sissy, thet it becomes our duty o' performin' the last sad rites o' plantin' ye, an' ye mustn't squeal for a preacher, 'ca'se they don't grow in the soil of Devil's Diggings."

"Correct. I'm not in need o' one yet."

"Ye will be!"

"Prove it!"

With an oath McBride strode forward, his fists doubled up, like sledgehammers.

It was evidently not his intention to show this girl any mercy, and he undoubtedly counted on an easy victory.

But he reckoned without his host.

Roaring Ruth's arms were about as long as those of her opponent, and the instant they got within striking distance McBride received a thwack under the left eye, that for the time caused him to see whole firmament of planets, to say nothing of little stars.

He retained his equilibrium, however, and struck back, fiercely and wildly, delivering not so much as one scientific blow.

This was perhaps owing to the fact that the first blow had in a measure dazed him, rendering him really unfit for active service. His bulldog nature, however, urged him on, even though he received severe punishment.

And Roaring Ruth?

She stood firmly braced, in pugilistic attitude, and, by sharp and telling execution proved, beyond the possibility of a doubt that she knew just what she was about.

She had surely practiced the art of self-defense before, thereby making it a "womanly" art as well as a "manly" one.

Every blow of the gambler she parried with perfect ease, and sent back a telling shot in return that would elicit a howl of pain and rage.

Small and shapely though were her doubled fists, they were hard, as here and there a bleeding bruise upon the ruffian's face gave token.

The crowd grew enthusiastic, but few of them dared applaud at McBride's misfortune for fear of after results.

At last, with a string of vindictive oaths, the ruffian made a final spirt, and endeavored to grapple with his wonderful adversary.

He was aware that he was badly used up, and he could not stand up under the punishment very long, unless he soon gained an advantage and held on to it.

His attempt to grapple, however, was anticipated by Roaring Ruth, and she frustrated it by planting a blow under his left ear which fairly lifted him off his feet and landed him against the wall in a heap.

He was not knocked senseless, but lay where he had fallen, making no attempt to rise.

He glared at Roaring Ruth, from out his swollen eyes, in a way that betrayed the wolfishness of his brutal nature.

"Quit!" he growled, as she took a step toward him. "I've had enough. I'll get square with you some other time.

"Oh! suit yourself about that—only don't try to pick on any other smaller than yourself when I'm about. I don't allow that sort o' thing, ye know!" Ruth declared.

She then walked off toward the hotel office and Dutch Dave and the burro followed her."

Roaring Ruth smoked cigarettes, roamed the mountains prospecting for

gold with Dutch Dave, sharing his bed roll. The tale makes no mention of sex, but many of the readers of the 1880's must have had their own conclusions.

If you enjoyed this excursion into the popular reading material of a hundred years ago, let your editor know, and I will continue with other stories in some future article.

NEWS NOTES

There is a society called the "National Association of Buffalo Bill Collectors" which publishes a quarterly newsletter entitled "Pahaska News." They are interested in members who collect Buffalo Bill ephemera, anything from his Wild West Show posters to dime novels about Buffalo Bill. If interested, write to Ed Borgen, P. O. Box 6554, Woodland Hills, Calif. 91365.

LETTER

Dear Eddie:

Lewis B. Miller, a very accomplished writer, produced some very good tales of adventure for adults and young people in the early part of this century.

Miller's stories were mostly of the pioneer type, with some divergence into logging and rafting on the Mississippi and trail driving.

Unfortunately Miller's stories never came to the attention of the vast array of young readers who reveled in the dime novel and the tales produced by the Stratemeyer Synwicate.

Most of Miller's stories appeared in a farm paper which was published in Pennsylvania, therefore he missed the urban market, and his excellent stories are practically unknown to most of the readers of today who are involved in reading and collecting boys series books and the famous dime novels and Alger stories.

Stanley Pachon of Bethlehem, Pa., was attempting to obtain the dates of Miller's birth and death and knew of my interest in Miller's works, so he asked me to try to obtain this information for him in my area.

I did find the dates in a local suburban library. He was born in 1861 and died in 1933, but in addition, I discovered that a small publisher in the Amish community adjacent to Lancaster, Pa., had reprinted some of Miller's books in 1982. The company is Pequea Publishers, 3981 East Newport Rd., Gordonville, Pa. 17529.

I wrote Pequea and they advised me that three titles were ready for delivery. They are soft cover editions and very reasonably priced. Stanley and I lived on farms in our youth and had read the Miller stories in the farm paper in which they appeared in serial form. It is too bad that Miller's stories are not better known, because of the story plots and the skill with which they were written.

Lewis B. Miller was born in Texas and lived in St. Louis in later life, and as to why his stories apparently were limited to a Pittsburgh published farm paper "The National Stockman and Farmer" is something which remains a mystery to me.

Bob Walters, Columbus, Ohio

A DIME NOVEL COLLECTOR'S BOOK SHELF

DE GAMLE KULORTE HAEFTER. By Knud Nielsen. Published by Eget Forlag, 1983. This is apparently a history of the Danish "dime novels." It is excellently illustrated with a colored cover. I wasn't able to read a word as it is written in Danish, but from the illustrations, I learned that at least 10 issues of the Rough Rider Weekly were published in Denmark as well as Nick Carter and Buffalo Bill stories, 69 and 56 respectively. I certainly hope there will be an English translation published in the not too distant future.

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